

HEARTSEASE.

"For as for heartsease, it groweth in a single night."

"WHAT be you doin' of, Mis' Lamson?" asked Mrs. Pettis, coming in from the kitchen, where she had been holding a long conversation with young Mrs. Lamson on the possibility of doing over sugar barberry. Mrs. Pettis was a heavy woman, bent almost double with rheumatism, and she carried a baggy umbrella for a cane. She was always sighing over the difficulty of "gettin' round the house," but nevertheless she made more calls than any one else in the neighborhood. It kind o' limbered her up, she said, to take a walk after she had been bendin' over the dishpan.

Mrs. Lamson looked up with an alert, bright glance. She was a little creature, and something still girlish lingered in her straight, slender figure and the poise of her head. "Old Lady Lamson" was over eighty, and she dressed with due deference to custom, but everything about her gained, in the wearing, an air of youth. Her aggressively brown front was rumpled a little, as if it had tried to crimp itself, only to be detected before the operation was well begun, and the purple ribbons of her cap flared rakishly aloft.

"I jest took up a garter," she said, with some apology in her tone. "Kind o' fiddlin' work, ain't it?"

"Last time I was here you was knittin' mittins," continued Mrs. Pettis, seating herself laboriously on the lounge, and leaning forward upon the umbrella clutched steadily in two fat hands. "You're dretful forehanded. I remember I said so then. Samwel ain't got a mittin to his name, I says, nor he won't have 'fore November."

"Well, I guess David's pretty well on 't for everything now," answered Mrs. Lamson, with some pride. "He's got five pair o' new mittins, an' my little

blue chist full o' stockin's. I knit 'em two-an'-two, an' two-an'-one, an' toed some on 'em off with white, an' some with red, so 's to keep 'em in pairs. But Mary said I better not knit any more, for fear the moths 'd get into 'em, an' so I stopped an' took up this garter. But 't is dretful fiddlin' work!"

A brief silence fell upon the two, while the sweet summer scents stole in at the window, — the breath of the cinnamon rose, of growing grass and good brown earth. Mrs. Pettis pondered, looking vacantly before her, and Old Lady Lamson knit hastily on. Her needles clicked together, and she turned her work with a jerk in beginning a row. But neither was oppressed by lack of speech. They understood each other, and no more thought of "making talk" than of pulling up a seed to learn whether it had germinated. It was Mrs. Pettis who, after a natural interval, felt moved to speak.

"Mary's master thoughtful of you, ain't she? 'T ain't many sons' wives would be so tender of anybody, now is it?"

Mrs. Lamson looked up sharply, and then, with the same quick movement, bent her eyes on her work.

"Mary means to do jest what's right," she answered. "If she don't make out, it ain't for lack o' tryin'."

"So I says to Samwel this morning. Old Lady Lamson ain't one thing to concern herself with, says I, but to git dressed an' set by the winder. When dinner time comes, she's got nothin' to do but hitch up to the table; an' she don't have to touch her hand to a dish. Now ain't that so, Mis' Lamson?"

"That's so," agreed Mrs. Lamson, with a little sigh, instantly suppressed. "It's different from what I thought to myself 't would be, when Mary come

here. 'Tain't in natur' she 'll have the feelin' for me she would for her own, I says; but I believe she has, an' more too. When she come for good, I made up my mind I 'd put up with everything, an' say 't was all in the day's work; but law! I never had to. She an' David both act as if I was sugar or salt, I dunno which."

"Don't ye never help round, washin'-days?"

"Law, no! Mary won't hear to 't. She 'd ruther have the dishes wait till everything's on the line; an' if I stir a step to go into the garden, to pick a mess o' beans or kill a currant worm, she's right arter me. 'Mother, don't you fall!' she says, a dozen times a day. 'I dunno what David 'd do to me if I let anything happen to you.' An' David, he's ketched it, too. One night, 'long towards Thanksgivin' time, I kicked the soapstone out o' bed, an' he come runnin' up as if he was bewitched. 'Mother,' says he, 'did you fall? You ain't had a stroke, have you?'"

Old Lady Lamson laughed huskily; her black eyes shone, and her cap ribbons nodded and danced, but there was an ironical ring to her merriment.

"Do tell!" responded Mrs. Pettis, in her ruminating voice. "Well, things were different when we was young married folks, an' used to do our own spinnin' an' weavin'."

"I guess so!" Mrs. Lamson dropped her busy hands in her lap, and leaned back a moment in eager retrospect. "Do you recollect that Friday we spun from four o'clock in the mornin' till six next evenin', because the menfolks had gone in the ma'sh, an' all we had to do was to stop an' feed the critters? An' Hiram Peasley come along with tin ware, an' you says, 'If you're a mind to stop at my house, an' throw a colander an' a long-handled dipper over the fence, under the flowerin' currant, an' wait till next time for your pay, I 'll take 'em,' says you. 'But I ain't goin' to

leave off spinnin' for anything less 'n Gabriel's trumpet,' says you. I remember your sayin' that as if 't was only yesterday; an' arter you said it, you kind o' drew down your face an' looked scairt. An' I never thought on 't again till next Sabbath evenin', when Jim Bellows rose to speak, an' made some handle about the Day o' Judgment, an' then I tickled right out."

"How you do set by them days!" said Mrs. Pettis, striving to keep a steady face, though her heavy sides were shaking. "I guess you remember 'em better 'n your prayers!"

"Yes, I laughed out loud, an' you passed me a pep'mint over the pew, an' looked as if you was goin' to cry. 'Don't!' says you, an' it sort o' come over me you knew what I was laughin' at. Why, if there ain't John Freeman stoppin' here,— Mary's sister's brother-in-law, you know. Lives down to Bell P'int. Guess he's pullin' up to give the news."

Mrs. Pettis came slowly to her feet, and scanned the farmer who was hitching his horse to the fence. When he had gone round to the back door, she turned, and grasped her umbrella with a firmer hand.

"Well, I guess 't won't pay me to set down again," she announced. "I'm goin' to take it easy on the way home. I dunno but I 'll let down the bars, an' poke a little ways into the north pastur', an' see if I can't get a mite o' pennyr'yal. I 'll be in again to-morrow or next day."

"So do, so do!" returned Mrs. Lamson.

"'T ain't no use to ask you to come down, I s'pose? You don't get out so fur nowadays."

"No," said the other, still with that latent touch of sarcasm in her voice. "If I should fall, there 'd be a great hurrah, boys— fire on the mountain, run, boys, run!"

Mrs. Pettis toiled out into the road, and Old Lady Lamson, laying her knit-

ting on the table, bent forward, not to watch her out of sight, but to make sure whether she really would stop at the north pasture.

"No, she's goin' by," she said aloud, with evident relief. "No, she ain't either. I'll be whipped if she ain't lettin' down the bars! 'T would smell kind o' good, I declare!"

She was still peering forward, one slender hand on the window-sill, when Mary, a pretty young woman with two nervous lines between her eyes, came hurrying in.

"Mother," she began, in that unnatural voice which is supposed to allay excitement in another, "I dunno what I'm goin' to do. Stella's sick."

"You don't say!" said Old Lady Lamson, turning away from the window. "What do they think 't is?"

"Fever, John says. An' she's so full-blooded, it'll be likely to go hard with her. They want me to go right down, an' David's got to carry me. John would, but he's gone to be referee in that land case, an' he won't be back for a day or two. It's a mercy David's just home from town, so he won't have to change his clo'es right through. Now, mother, if you should have little 'Liza Tolman come an' stay with you, do you think anything would happen s'posin' we left you alone 'just one night?"

A little flush rose in the old lady's withered cheek. Her eyes gleamed brightly through her glasses.

"Don't you worry one mite about me," she replied, in an even voice. "You change your dress, an' get off afore it's dark. I shall be all right."

"David's harnessin' now," said Mary, beginning to untie her apron. "I sent John down to the lower barn to call him. But, mother, if anything should happen to you" —

"Lord-a-massy! nothin' 's goin' to!" the old lady broke forth, in momentary impatience. "Don't stan' here talkin'. You better have your mind on Stella.

Fever's a quicker complaint than old age. It allers was, an' allers will be."

"Oh, I know it! I know it!" cried Mary, starting towards the door. "There ain't a thing for you to do. There's new bread and preserves on the dairy wheel, an' you have 'Liza Tolman pick you up some chips, an' build the fire for your tea; an' don't you wash the dishes, mother. Just leave 'em in the sink. And for mercy sake take a candle, an' not meddle with kerosene" —

"Come, come, ain't you ready?" came David's voice from the door. "I can't keep the horse stan'in' here till he's all eat up with flies."

Mary fled to her bedroom, unbuttoning her dress as she ran, and David came in, bringing an air of outdoor freshness into the little sitting-room, with his regal height, his broad shoulders, and tanned, fresh face.

"Well, mother," he said, putting a hand of clumsy kindness on her shoulder, "if anything happens to you while we're gone, I shall wish we'd let the whole caboodle of 'em die in their tracks. Don't s'pose anything will, do ye?"

"Law, no, David!" exclaimed the old lady, looking at him with beaming pride. "You come here an' let me pick that mite o' lint off your arm. I shall be tickled to death to get rid o' ye."

"Now, mother," counseled Mary, when she came out of the bedroom, hastily tying her bonnet strings, "you watch the schoolchildren, an' ask 'Liza Tolman to stay with you, an' if she can't, to get one of the Daltons; an' tell her we'll give her some Bartlett pears when they're ripe."

"Yes, yes, I hear," answered the old lady, rising, and setting back her chair in its accustomed corner. "Now, do go along, or ye won't be down to Grapevine Run afore five o'clock."

She watched them while they drove out of the yard, shading her eyes with one nervous hand.

"Mother," called Mary, "don't you

stan' there in that wind, with nothin' on your head!"

The old lady turned back into the house, and her face was alive with glee.

"Wind!" she ejaculated scornfully, and yet with the tolerance of one too happy for complaint. "Wind! I guess there would n't be so much, if some folks would save their breath to cool their porridge!"

She did not go back to the sitting-room and her peaceful knitting. She walked into the pantry, where she gave the shelves a critical survey, and then, returning to the kitchen, looked about her once more.

"If it's one day sence I've been down sullar," she said aloud, "it's two year." She was lighting a candle as she spoke. In a moment more she was taking sprightly steps down the stairs into the darkness below.

"Now, mother, don't you fall!" she chuckled, midway in the descent, and it was undeniable that the voice sounded much like Mary's in her anxious moods. "Now, ain't I a mean creatur' to stan' here laughin' at 'em!" she went on. "Well, if she don't keep things nice! 'Taters all sprouted, an' the preserve cupboard never looked better in my day. Mary's been well brought up, — I'll say that for her."

Old Lady Lamson must have spent at least half an hour in the cellar, for when she ascended it was after four o'clock, and the schoolchildren had passed the house on their way home. She heard their voices under the elms at the turn of the road.

"I ain't to blame if I can't ketch 'em," she remarked calmly, as she blew out her light. "I don't see's anybody could say I was to blame. An' I could n't walk up to the Tolmans' to ask 'Liza. I might fall!"

She set about her preparations for supper. It was a favorite maxim in the household that supper should be eaten early, "to get it out of the way," and

to-night this unaccustomed handmaid had additional reasons for haste. But the new bread and preserves were ignored. She built a rousing fire in the little kitchen stove; she brought out the moulding-board, and with trembling eagerness proceeded to mix cream-of-tar-tar biscuits. Not Cellini himself nor Jeanie Carlyle had awaited the results of passionate labor with a more strenuous eagerness; and when she drew out the painful of delicately browned biscuits, she set it down on the table, and looked at it in sheer delight.

"I'll be whipped if they ain't as good as if I'd made 'em every night for the last two year!" she cried. "I ain't got to get my hand in, an' that's truth an' fact!"

She brought out some "cold b'iled dish," made her strong green tea, and sat down to a meal such as they taste who have reached the Delectable Mountains. It held within it all the savor of a happy past; it satisfied her hungry soul.

After she had washed the supper dishes and scrupulously swept the hearth, she rested, for a moment's thought, in the old rocking-chair, and then took her way, candle in hand, to the attic. There was no further self-confidence on the stairs; she was too serious now. Her hours were going fast. The attic, in spite of the open windows, lay hot under summer's touch upon the shingles outside, and odorous of the dried herbs hanging in bunches here and there.

"Wormwood — thoroughwort — spearmint," she mused, as she touched them, one after another, and inhaled their fragrance. "'T ain't so long ago I was out pickin' herbs an' dryin' 'em. Well, well, well!"

She made her way under the eaves, and pulled out a hair trunk studded with brass nails. A rush-bottomed chair stood near by, and, setting her candle in it, she knelt before the trunk and began lifting out its contents: a brocaded satin

waistcoat of a long-past day, a woolen comforter knit in stripes, a man's black broadcloth coat. She smoothed them as she laid them by, and there was a wondering note in her lowered voice.

"My Lord!" she whispered reverently, as if speaking to One who would hear and understand, "it's over fifty year!"

A pile of yellowed linen lay in the bottom of the trunk, redolent of camphor from contact with its perishable neighbors. She lifted one shirt after another, looking at them in silence. Then she laid back the other clothes, took up her candle and the shirts, and went downstairs again. In hot haste she rebuilt the kitchen fire, and set two large kettles of water on the stove. She dragged the washing-bench into the back kitchen from its corner in the shed, and on it placed her tubs; and when the water was heated, she put the garments into a tub, and rubbed with the vigor and ease of a woman well accustomed to such work. All the sounds of the night were loud about her, and the song of the whippoorwill came in at the open door. He was very near. His presence should have been a sign of approaching trouble, but Old Lady Lamson did not hear him. Her mind was reading the lettered scroll of a vanished year. Perhaps the touch of the warm water on her hands recalled her to the present.

"Seems good to feel the suds," she said happily, holding up one withered hand and letting the foam drip from its fingers. "I wish 't I could dry out-doors. But when mornin' come, they'd be all of a sop."

She washed and rinsed the garments, and, opening a clothes-horse, spread them out to dry. Then she drew a long breath, put out her candle, and wandered to the door. The garden lay before her, unreal in the beauty of moonlight. Every bush seemed an enchanted wood. The old lady went forth, lingering at first, as one too rich for choosing, then with a firmer step. She closed the little gate,

and walked out into the country road. She hurried along to the old signboard, and turned aside unerringly into a hollow there, where she stooped and filled her hands with tansy, pulling it up in great bunches, and pressing it eagerly to her face.

"Seventy-four year ago!" she told the unseen listener of the night with the same wonder in her voice. "Sir laid dead, an' they sent me down here to pick tansy to put round him. Seventy-four year ago!"

Still holding it, she rose and went through the bars into the dewy lane. Down the wandering path, trodden daily by the cows, she walked, and came out in the broad pasture, irregular with its little hillocks, where, as she had been told from her babyhood, the Indians used to plant their corn. She entered the woods by a cart-path hidden from the moon, and went on with a light step, gathering a bit of green here and there, — now hemlock, now a needle from the sticky pine, — and inhaling its balsam on her hands. A sharp descent, and she had reached the spot where the brook ran fast, and where lay "Peggy's b'lin' spring," named for a great-aunt she had never seen, but whose gold beads she had inherited, and who had consequently seemed to her a person of opulence and ease.

"I wish 't I'd brought a cup," she said. "There ain't no such water within twenty mile."

She crouched beside the little black pool, where the moon glinted in mysterious, wavering symbols which beckoned the gaze upwards, and, making a cup of her hand, drank eagerly. There was a sound near by, as if some wood creature were stirring; she thought she heard a fox barking in the distance. Yet she was really conscious only of the wonder of time, the solemn record of the fleeting years.

When she made her way back through the woods, the moon was sinking and

the shadows had grown heavy. As she reached the bars again on her homeward track, she stopped suddenly, and her face broke into smiling at the pungent fragrance rising from the bruised herbage beneath her feet. She stooped and gathered one telltale, homely weed, mixed as it was with the pasture grass. "Penny'yal," she said happily, and felt the richness of being.

When Old Lady Lamson had ironed her shirts and put them away again, all hot and sweet from the fire, it was five o'clock, and the birds had long been trying to drag creation up from sleep to sing with them the wonders of the dawn. At six, she had her cup of tea, and when, at eight, her son drove into the yard, she

came placidly to the side door to meet him, her knitting in her hands.

"Well, if I ain't glad!" called David. "I could n't get it out o' my mind somethin' 'd happened to you. Stella's goin' to be all right, they think, but nothin' will do but Mary must stay a spell. Do you s'pose you an' I could keep house a week or so, if I do the heft o' the work?"

Old Lady Lamson's eyes took on the look which sometimes caused her son to inquire suspiciously, "Mother, what you laughin' at?"

"I guess we can, if we try hard enough," she said soberly, rolling up her yarn. "Now you come in, an' I'll get you a bite o' somethin' t' eat."

Alice Brown.
